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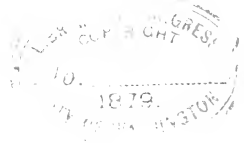
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PROOF POSITIVE.

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NEW YORK:

S. W. GREEN, PRINTER, 16 AND 18 JACOB STREET.

1879.

CHARACTERS.

ARTHUR WENTWICH.—“ I must believe the facts, though they prove my wife a murderess.”

MRS. WENTWICH.—“ Must I be hanged because the circumstances are lies against me ?”

HESTER ALDRIDGE.—“ Mad ? Well, see how adroitly a maniac can plan revenge.”

ABEL MILBURN.—“ Forgive me, if you can, for the part I have had in your sorrow.”

MRS. VANMANDER.—“ Oh, yes ; I'm very deaf ; but I can hear my gold chink as well as you.”

JONAS POGGENBURG.—“ My present purpose is to profitably blend diplomacy and courtship.”

DR. FARLOW.—“ I am the custodian of her wealth.”

MR. MOOK.—“ Duels may be fought, sir, if the parties are blood-thirsty and sly.”

MRS. MOOK.—“ Not flirt ? Then what's the use of being a jealous man's wife ?”

HENRY.—“ It's cruel to make a servant swear against his mistress.”

MAID.—“ I'm here to look after Mrs. Vanmander.”

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PROOF POSITIVE.

ACT FIRST.

SCENE.—*A sitting-room in the Wentwich residence, on Washington Heights. A part of a hallway and the lower end of a staircase are visible through a wide, arched doorway at the right upper corner. A large bay-window occupies a great part of the back, through which, during the burning of the bonfire at the close of the act, a landscape is visible. Door L. A lighted chandelier hangs in the centre, and the room is completely and handsomely furnished.*

The rise of the curtain discloses JONAS POGGENBURG standing, L. C., with his back to the audience, examining the room, and ABEL MILBURN standing R. C. They and the other characters in this act wear evening dress.

Abel Well, Uncle Jonas, what do you think of it?

Poggenburg (Turning abruptly to ABEL.) It is grand, sumptuous, perfect—how did you get into it?

[Speaks volubly.]

Abel How did I gain the familiar acquaintance of the Wentwich family? Why, it came about through the college friendship of Arthur Wentwich, naturally enough.

Pog. Not naturally, Abel Milburn, not naturally. You are my nephew, and therefore akin to ill-fortune. It is natural that you, like your uncle and your dead father, should be always running after success, and only getting near enough to be kicked by its hind feet. *[Puts his arm familiarly through ABEL'S.]* Abel, my nephew, I have one single fifty-dollar bill in my pocket—millions in the scope of

my plans, but only fifty in my pocket. Yesterday I would have said that I was out of kicking range of success; but to-day I met you—you have brought me to this social gathering, where the aroma of wealth can be sniffed in the air, and once more I am buoyant with hope. Abel, what are you?

Abel Well, Uncle Jonas, I'm a lawyer; but I confess that, if it were not for the business that Wentwich entrusts to my management, my profession wouldn't be very lucrative.

Pog. (*Drawing back and looking admiringly at ABEL.*) Lucky fellow. [*Eagerly.*] Can't you spare me a little of your success? Can't you put me in the way of something remunerative—a rich wife, say. I'm a clever diplomat, as I have proved by serving my country illustriously as consul at Kitto. The same diplomatic ability would carry all before me as a wooer. Eh?

[*Enter ARTHUR WENTWICH and HESTER ALDRIDGE from arch, she on his arm. They come down c. ABEL and POGGENBURG go to L. c.*

Abel (*To HESTER.*) Let me present my uncle, Mr. Poggenburg. Miss Aldridge [*HESTER and POGGENBURG bow.*] Mr. Wentwich [*WENTWICH and POGGENBURG shake hands.*] I ventured to bring my uncle, because—

Wentwich Because you knew it was a safe venture. I am glad to meet you, Mr. Poggenburg. [*POGGENBURG shakes hands with him again, and then with HESTER.*] Make him feel at home, Abel. But I must go to the parlor; our guests are beginning to arrive. Shall you remain here, Hester?

Hester (*Hesitating as ABEL rather eagerly motions her to a chair, and then taking WENTWICH'S arm.*) No; I will go with you, if you please. [*Bows. Exit WENTWICH and HESTER, the latter watched intently by ABEL.*]

Pog. (*Slapping ABEL'S shoulder.*) Abel, my nephew, you are in love with that young lady. Don't prevaricate. My diplomatic service has made my eyes peculiarly discerning—absolutely microscopic. Who is she?

Abel Hester Aldridge.

Pog. I knew that. What is she?

Abel An old friend of the Wentwich family—a very distant relative, I believe, and an heiress. She had been in Europe several years, when, a few weeks ago, she returned to the city. She has been a guest here since then.

Pog. Much money?

Abel So much that she doesn't take time to count it.

Pog. I've dropped into the very midst of wealth. Doesn't she want a business manager?

Abel Oh, she has one. Dr. Farlow is the executor of her estate.

Pog. Wonder if he would sell out?

Abel He is here to-night. Make him an offer. [*Laughs.* Enter DR. FARLOW.] There he is. Now is your chance.

Dr. Farlow Good evening, Mr. Milburn.

Abel Good evening, Doctor. This is my uncle, Mr. Poggenburg.

Pog. (*Shaking hands with DR. FARLOW.*) Glad to know you, sir.

Dr. Farlow I am looking for my wife, who is rather nervous from illness, and my ward.

Pog. Whose money, as well as herself, needs looking after, eh?

Dr. Farlow Sir?

Abel I had casually remarked, just as you came in, that Miss Aldridge was an heiress.

Dr. Farlow (*Significantly.*) Yes; a great many appear to have observed that fact. But I must find her. [*Exit.*

Pog. Abel, I trust you appreciate the gravity of the situation. Don't lose the heiress through lack of care. Popped yet?

Abel (*Exasperated.*) Yes.

Pog. What was her answer?

Abel Nothing. She's an enigma. But I don't think she cares for me. If she loved a man at all it would be with an intensity that could not be hidden from him. She is a slumbering volcano of passion, and some day there will be a tremendous eruption.

Pog. Tears of lava, and throes of internal, emotional convulsion?

[*Enter* MRS. WENTWICH, *supporting* MRS. VANMANDER, *who is very old.*

Abel (*Rising.*) Hush. [*Mrs. W. and Mrs. V. come down c., Mrs. W. bows to ABEL, and helps Mrs. V. into an easy chair.*] This is my uncle, Mr. Poggenburg.

[*They bow.*

Mrs. Went. I trust you have already been made to feel welcome. But I fear I am tardy.

Abel Yes, Arthur is already in the parlor with Miss Aldgate.

Mrs. Went. (*Quickly.*) With Miss Aldgate? (*Smiles with an effort.*) Mr. Milburn, will you take me in? And you, Mr. Poggenburg?

(*She takes ABEL's arm and goes toward the arch, looking back at POGGENBURG, while he curiously regards Mrs. VANMANDER, who has sat stiff and immovable. Exeunt MRS. WENTWICH and ABEL; but ABEL re-enters instantly, and runs down to POGGENBURG.*

Abel Uncle, there's your opportunity. That's Mrs. Vanmander. (*POGGENBURG gesticulates that she will overhear, but she pays no attention.*) She's immensely wealthy—a widowed aunt of Wentwich's. Oh, she doesn't hear me; she's as deaf as a post. (*She sees them, discloses an ear-trumpet, puts it to her ear and looks inquiringly. ABEL speaks lower.*) I'll introduce you. (*Speaks loud in the trumpet.*) My uncle, Mr. Poggenburg.

Mrs. Vanmander Eh! Pollywog?

Abel (*Louder.*) Poggenburg—Mr. Poggenburg, my uncle.

Mrs. Van. (*Surveying POGGENBURG, who bows.*) Oh!

Abel Mrs. Wentwich is waiting. (*Exit hurriedly.*

Pog. (*Regarding MRS. VANMANDER, who has put down her trumpet and is dozing.*) Rich, and cannot reasonably live forever. I'll do it. What a grand old ruin! But I guess she could be restored a little. There ought to be a new set of teeth put in right away. That could be done, easily; but the ears—I never heard of false ears, though there may be such things. I'll inquire. Sounding-boards over her tympanums would be better than that trumpet. I'll get an

aurist to come around and make an estimate. (*Takes a book from the table.*) A novel—a very sentimental novel. Torpid temperaments are only affected by strong doses. Maybe I can find a dose here (*turns the pages*) strong and sweet. Ah! “Alfonso said to her—” that passage will do. I will pour the dose into her ears—ear—through the funnel. (*Goes to her, with the book behind him. Taps her on the shoulder. She awakes, and puts the trumpet to her ear. He speaks in it.*) Do you dance, Mrs. Vanmander? No! Now that is a shame—a burning shame to rob the merry mazes—(*Aside.*) Now for the dose. (*He holds the book behind her, fumbling the pages to find a passage. She has fallen asleep, and dropped the trumpet.*) Ah! this is it. Eh? She is asleep. (*Taps her on the shoulder. She awakes, drowsily, and he puts the trumpet in her hand and up to her ear. He holds the book open behind her, and is about to read from it, when she falls asleep, and the trumpet drops.*) Asleep again! (*Picks up the trumpet, puts it to her ear, and shouts in it.*) Mrs. Vanmander!

Mrs. Van. (*Screaming.*) Ah! What has happened?

(*POGGENBURG tries to put the trumpet to her ear, but she moves her head about excitedly, and he cannot do it. He seizes her head, holds it still, and puts the trumpet in position.*)

Pog. (*In the trumpet.*) Be calm! Nothing has happened! You are in no danger—

Mrs. Van. Danger!

Pog. In no danger, I said. You are excited. Shall I get you some stimulant?

Mrs. Van. (*Promptly.*) There is a decanter of brandy in the hallway.

Pog. (*Aside.*) Her deafness seems to be intermittent.

(*Exit POGGENBURG. MRS. VANMANDER falls asleep, and drops the trumpet. Re-enter POGGENBURG with a wine-glass in one hand, and the book in the other. He picks up the trumpet, and tries to put it to her upturned ear; but is bothered by his hands being full. Enter Maid. POGGENBURG tries to hide the book under his coat. In his confu-*

sion he pours the wine into MRS. VANMANDER'S ear through the trumpet.

Mrs. Van. Oh ! I'm drowning !

Pog. Great heaven ! I have dosed her now !

(MRS. VANMANDER falls back in her chair. The Maid fans her, and POGGENBURG holds her salts to her nose. She revives, rises, looks indignantly at POGGENBURG. Exit, assisted by the Maid.

Pog. An unpromising outset. I must make amends. My present purpose is to profitably blend diplomacy and courtship.

(Exit through arch, turning to the left. Enter WENTWICH and HESTER through the archway from the right.

Went. The waltz was too fast for you. It has taken your breath away.

Hester Well, yes ; it has affected me rather strangely. (Sits, and fans herself.) Do you remember our last waltz ?

Went. That was—

Hester Three years ago, and it was the last time we met before I went to Europe. We were [hesitates] unreserved friends, then.

Went. And we are friends now.

Hester [Slowly.] Yes, friends [Speaking with a little bitterness, but composedly.] We were lovers then—don't you remember ?

Went. [With embarrassment] Yes.

Hester Almost affianced, were we not ? But after I went away you married, and I [checking herself] Tell me how you won your wife.

Went Well, I fell in love with her—and married her.

Hester How—how ? Tell me the whole story. I want to hear it all.

Went There is nothing to conceal, Hester. It was a mere chance—it usually is, I suppose. She was poor, so poor that hard poverty had made her desperate. Out of work as a teacher, with no parents, with starvation at her door, she was at the pitch of reckless despair, when an accident took

me to her. [*Goes to the back of Hester's chair.*] I helped her to employment, first, and now she is my wife.

Hester [*With a forced laugh*] You would be a poor novelist. You have crowded a whole romance into a hundred words, and so told a most barren story.

Went. I know it. I have left out the rapid growth of my love for her, and my pride and happiness as the husband of such a woman.

[*Enter MRS. WENTWICH. She stops unseen on seeing them together.*

Hester That is improbable.

Went. Improbable?

Hester I think it is improbable that you really love a woman whom you found and married under such circumstances. I think it is probable that you love me, now that we are together again, just as you used to say you did.

Mrs. Went. (*Coming forward.*) Do you think so? Let him answer. [*HESTER rises. Both women gaze at WENTWICH inquiringly.*] Should I have doubted what your reply would be?

Went. No. I love my wife, truly and only. [*He puts one arm around her, and she throws herself on his shoulder.*] *Hester*, forgive me if I have injured you. You are our guest, and—

Hester Forgive? It is not in my heart to forgive the wrong you have done me.

Mrs. Went. (*Angrily.*) Have you done nothing to be forgiven? You have tried to steal my husband's love, and if you had succeeded I believe I would have killed you. [*Goes toward HESTER, who drops into a chair.*] My husband was telling you, as I entered, a little of what I was when he found me. I will tell you more. Bad fortune lowered my parents from riches to poverty; and then they died, leaving me all alone. We had recently come to New York, and I was without a friend here—without relatives anywhere. Well, I thought I could support myself with some of the accomplishments that I had acquired in better days, but I was mistaken. For weeks I went wearily here and there, offering to teach music, drawing, anything that I had learned

in a thorough education. Then I tried to earn a living with a needle, and nearly starved, for I could not use it skilfully. Hunger made me desperate. One day there was neither work nor food in my miserable room. This is what I did. I collected every book, picture, letter—every reminder of what I had been—every memento of a happy past—I piled them all on the fireless hearth, and burned them. As they blazed up, I said: “That destroys every tie between me and the past. As to the future I am careless, except that I will not starve any longer. This world shall give me the living that it owes me.” Then, full of a wild, unreasoning desperation, I went into the street. [WENTWICH takes her hands, and she nestles close to him.] Chance led me straight to Arthur Wentwich.

Hester You are better than he at a romance. Your story is entertaining.

Mrs. Went. I have told it to you so that you may know how much reason I have for loving my husband. You understand now that he is indeed all the world to me. [*Puts her arms about his neck. Then turns abruptly to* HESTER.] You understand now why I could kill the woman who should take him from me.

Hester You forget that you have taken him from me—if, indeed, you really have his love. [*Rises.*]

Went. Hush. This is a needless quarrel, and will be overheard. Come.

[*He and* MRS. WENTWICH *start toward the arch. He by a gesture asks* HESTER *to go too. She does not answer. Enter* ABEL. *Exeunt* MR. and MRS. WENTWICH. ABEL *approaches* HESTER, *who looks at him vacantly.*

Abel How rapt you look, Miss Aldgate. Your moods are various. Ah! you are a puzzle, and there's little use in guessing at you.

Hester Just now I am in a mood of recklessness—a mood that comes over me sometimes after excitement—a mood that frightens me when I am under its influence.

Abel Is it a mood in which it would be hazardous for me to press my humble suit?

Hester (*As though struck by a sudden idea.*) No. [*He goes quickly to her side.*] But—

Abel You will be mine?

Hester (*Rises.*) If I say “yes” that must be my whole answer. Why I so suddenly decide, you must not ask. I believed that you sought me for my money.

Abel I protest—

Hester No matter—I have said “yes;” but you must take me quickly at my word. [*Aside.*] I will make them believe I am happy, no matter how much misery the pretence may cost me. [*To ABEL.*] I want it to be given out that we had met before I came here, and were betrothed before to-night. Do not give me time to repent.

Abel No time too short until our marriage; and if you have a mind for surprising them—you said you were reckless—why not to-night? A short ride to a clergyman, and we return husband and wife.

Hester (*Aside.*) An elopement. Where will the impetus of my resentment carry me?

[*Enter POGGENBURG and MRS. VANMANDER, he speaking in the trumpet which she holds to her ear.*]

Abel Your answer, Miss Aldridge?

Hester (*Observing POGGENBURG and MRS. VANMANDER*) Meet me in the arbor as soon as you can, and I will give you my decision. (*Exit L. D. ABEL goes to the bay-window and looks out.*)

Pog. (*Speaking in the trumpet as he comes forward*) Old, Mrs. Vanmander?

Mrs. Vanmander Eh? Don't call me Old Mrs. Vanmander, sir.

Pog. That is the very notion I was combating.

Mrs. Vanmander Combative, am I? (*ABEL comes down.*)

Pog. Ah! Abel! Everything that enters her comprehension must go in, in the form of howls, through that bugle. That process is a great hindrance to progress in my courtship. But my will, Abel, my will is indomitable—indomitable. I am keeping cool and collec—

[*Mrs. VANMANDER puts up the trumpet, with the open end close to POGGENBURG'S mouth, just in time to catch the unfinished word "collec."*]

Mrs. Vanmander Eh? Colic! (*Sits.*)

Pog. (*In the trumpet*) Collected, ma'am. I was speaking to my nephew about collections, Mrs. Vanmander—collections for the heathen. (*To ABEL*) Another worriment, Abel, has been a young lady of exceeding pertness and impudence, who boldly declares that she wants to flirt. Her name is Mook—Mrs. Mook—married—married to a man who is, she says, insanely jealous of her. Now, a long experience, has led me to think twice—to think several times, before succumbing to the wiles of woman—

[*Mrs. VANMANDER catches the last words, as before, by flashing up the trumpet in the speaker's face.*]

Mrs. Vanmander Eh? Wiles of woman? Do you mean me, sir?

Pog. (*In the trumpet*) No, no, dear madam—other women—less worthy women.

Mrs. Vanmander Ah!

Pog. (*In the trumpet*) I was explaining to my nephew how, after long resisting the wiles of women—designing women—I am at last affected by the spontaneous and unaffected attractiveness of yourself. I was saying that, compared with the days of old, I am—

Mrs. Vanmander Eh? Old? I?

Pog. That is the way I have to expend breath. [*In the trumpet*] You old? Bless me, no. You are just in the blush, and flush, and gush of womanhood. (*Aside*) You ancient mariner on the sea of life. (*To ABEL*) As I was saying, this astonishing woman—this astounding Mrs. Mook—has been persistent in her attentions to your uncle, thereby endangering his success with this centenarian. How are you getting along with the heiress?

Abel Wait and see.

Pog. Go slowly, Abel, and surely. If the slowness of my success is a token of its sureness, then I am encouraged. The old adder doesn't hear half I say, and misunderstands

the other half. But I am proceeding with cool impetuosity, with diplomatic vigor—with a vigor so deliberate as not to alarm, yet adroitly calculated to bring my suit to a crisis in about four days. (*Exit ABEL. MRS. VANMANDER puts up her trumpet.*) We were speaking, my dear Mrs. Vanmander, speaking admiringly, of the zest with which you enter into the entertainment. I suppose, now, that you are over forty years old, but you really have the vivacity—the social vivacity and conversational animation—of a girl.

[*Enter MRS. MOOK. She looks around, as though searching for somebody, and, seeing POGGENBURG, runs up to him playfully. MRS. VANMANDER stares at them, and holds her trumpet to her ear, trying to hear the conversation.*]

Mrs. Mook Did I leave you? Well, never mind. I'll stay a long time with you to make up for it. I've been in the garden, all alone,—to get a breath of fresh air. I thought, possibly, you might follow. And I wanted to get away from my bothersome husband, too. The ardor of that infatuated man's love is oppressive, really. And he is so jealous—unreasonably, I assure you. What if I do flirt occasionally with somebody, like you, Mr. Poggenburg—that is no reason why he should threaten to kill you?

Pog. (Nervously) Did he threaten to kill *me*?

Mrs. Mook With cruelty, Mr. Poggenburg. He said something, just now, in a wild kind of way, about cutting out your heart.

Pog. Goodness gracious! (*MRS. VANMANDER exhibits lively curiosity, and POGGENBURG goes to her.*) We were speaking about butchery—about a proposed wanton butchery of an unoffending human being.

Mrs. Mook Never mind, Mr. Poggenburg—isn't a flirtation worth some risk? The danger gives zest to the pleasure. (*She looks up languishingly into his face.*)

Pog. In heaven's name, don't do that! Your husband might see you.

Mrs. Mook Oh, no. He is out in the garden, looking for me. I suppose he thinks I am out there walking with you.

I don't doubt but he has a knife in one hand, a revolver in the other, and a club in the other.

Pog. A three-handed maniac seeking to slay me. O gracious! (*Mrs. Mook gives him another expressive look*) Please don't do that. I am not prepared to die.

[*Enter MR. MOOK, excitedly, striding to Mrs. Mook's side. POGGENBURG trembles violently.*]

Mook (*To Mrs. Mook, in a hoarse whisper*) Where is he? (*Mrs. Mook looks at POGGENBURG slyly, and he makes entreating gestures to her to stop*) How long have you been in this room, madam?

Mrs. Mook (*Demurely*) About five minutes.

Mook Were you out there in the garden just now, in the arbor?

Mrs. Mook In the arbor—no, sir.

Mook. [*To POGGENBURG*] Were you?

Pog. No; I will swear, sir—swear negatively.

Mook. [*Cooling*] I am glad to hear it. Bloodshed is averted.

[*Mrs. VANMANDER adjusts the trumpet.*]

Pog. [*In the trumpet*] More talk about butchery.

Mrs. Mook Let's play cards. The parlor is suffocating.

Pog. Yes, by all means. That may divert us from contemplation of bloodshed. Come, Mrs. Vanmander.

[*Mr. and Mrs. Mook bring forward the card-table.*]

Mrs. Mook [*Having directed MR. MOOK in fixing the chairs*] There!

Pog. What shall we play?

Mrs. Mook Euchre, if that suits you all.

Pog. Partners?

Mrs. Mook. Yes; you and I will play together. [*Gives him a languishing glance.*]

[*MOOK glares at them savagely.*]

Pog. (*Aside*) This creature will be the cause of my assassination.

[*They sit at the table—MR. MOOK at the back, MRS. MOOK at the right, POGGENBURG at his left, and MRS. VANMANDER facing him. They play suitably during the ensuing conversation.*

Mrs. Mook Is it a heart? Ah! Mr. Poggenburg, I will assist you.

Mook [*Savagely*] And I'll euchre you.

Mrs. Mook That is one trick.

Mook Trick? Aha!

Pog. Does a game of cards usually excite you in this way, sir?

Mrs. Mook There, Mr. Poggenburg, count two for us. How lovely we do get along together!

Pog. [*Aside*] She means to get me killed, I know she does.

Mook [*With emphasis*] It is my turn now [*POGGENBURG starts*] to deal.

Pog. [*Relieved*] Oh!

Mook Clubs! [*POGGENBURG starts again*] What do you say to that, sir?

Pog. I pass.

Mrs. Mook. (*Languishingly*) I agree with Mr. Poggenburg.

Mr. Mook Eh? Well—I reluctantly turn down the club.

Mrs. Mook Do make it hearts again, Mr. Poggenburg.

Pog. Never.

Mrs. Van. Spades.

Mook [*Rising in great excitement, and throwing his cards over his head*] I distinctly observed Mr. Poggenburg's foot resting on Mrs. Mook's toes—or Mrs. Mook's foot tapping Mr. Poggenburg's toes! Anyhow, there was a suspicious contact of feet under the table, and I demand an explanation. Duels may still be fought in this country, if the foes are bloodthirsty and sly.

Pog. Upon my honor as a man—upon the word of a man whose word is better than his oath—I deny any intention of offence. If your wife's feet are large—[*Mrs. Mook looks at him reproachfully*] Don't look at me, or my blood will be upon your head. [*Aside*] And she will ruin

my prospects with this fossil. [*In* MRS. VANMANDER'S trumpet] We are still on the theme of butchery, Mrs. Vanmander.

Mrs. Van. Eh? Who will butcher Mrs. Vanmander?

Pog. (*In the trumpet*) Nobody, while I am here to defend you.

[*MOOK sullenly picks up his cards. Enter a maid, going to* MRS. VANMANDER, *who rises and takes her arm.*

Pog. What is this? Are you going to take her away?

Maid It is her time for going to bed, sir. She never varies. I'm here to look after Mrs. Vanmander.

[*POGGENBURG rises and goes to take the other arm of* MRS. VANMANDER.

Pog. (*To the maid*) Which is Mrs. Vanmander's room?

Maid It is the northeast corner room, sir, on the second floor.

Pog. Do you think she could hear a serenade?

Maid I guess not, sir; she is very deaf.

Pog. Not if a man stood on a ladder, close to her window, and sang very loud?

Maid She might, sir—I don't know.

[*MRS. VANMANDER adjusts the trumpet.*

Pog. (*In the trumpet*) Do you sleep with that trumpet in your ear?

Mrs. Van. Eh? Troubled ear? two of them. Oh, yes, I'm very deaf, but I can hear my gold clink as well as you.

Pog. (*As* MRS. VANMANDER *and the maid go toward the door—in triumph*) Good-night!

Mrs. Van. Good what?

Pog. Good-night? Yes, I will call again—certainly.

[*Exit* MRS. VANMANDER *and maid. POGGENBURG follows them to the door, and kisses* MRS. VANMANDER'S *hand.*

Mook (*Aside*) What a ruthless gallant he is! I must watch my wife.

Mrs. Mook We will have to play a three-hand game.

Mook Cut-throat.

Pog. (*Returning to the table*) Eh?

Mook Three-handed euchre is called cut-throat, isn't it?

Pog. Oh yes. [*Sits. Enter DR. FARLOW.*]

Mrs. Mook Just in time, Dr. Farlow. We want you.

Dr. Farlow It is a lucky physician who is just in time when he is needed. [*Comes down.*]

Mrs. Mook We want you to play euchre.

[*DR. FARLOW takes the seat in front of the table, and they play. Enter MRS. WENTWICH.*]

Pog. (Aside) I hope I will not need him as a surgeon.

[*MRS. WENTWICH stands at the back of MOOK's chair and watches the game.*]

Mrs. Mook You look strangely, Mrs. Wentwich. Are you ill?

Dr. Farlow You are surely feverish, Mrs. Wentwich.

Mrs. Went. The excitement doesn't improve my looks, I presume.

Mook Your guests seem to enjoy themselves, in various ways. Some, I am bound to say, in unseemly flirtation.

Mrs. Mook Oh, Mr. Mook!

Pog. (Aside) There he goes again.

Mook And some in planning an elopement, judging by something I overheard.

Mrs. Mook Oh, how romantic!

Pog. (Aside) Can anybody have got ahead of me with Mrs. Vanmander? [*To MR. MOOK*] Come, let us know about this.

[*They stop playing, and show deep interest. DR. FARLOW moves his chair aside.*]

Mook Well, I went into the garden a few minutes ago, and heard low voices in the arbor. I was specially interested [*Looks significantly at MRS. MOOK and MR. POGGENBURG.*] It was a man and a woman—who I could not see; but it was easy to tell by their tones that they were lovers, though I couldn't hear all they said. I heard the man say, "Go and dress yourself for travelling. Stay in your room until you see a bright light over yonder in the field. I will have a

heap of stubble fired. That will be a signal for you, and at the same time divert the attention of any guests who may happen to be in the garden. Then go to the gate, as soon as you can without observation, and I will be there with a carriage." That is all I can remember.

Mrs. Went. (*Suppressing agitation*) And you could not discern who they were?

Mook I could not; but one voice sounded like that of Miss Aldridge.

Dr. Farlow You are mistaken, sir.

Mook Maybe, maybe.

Mrs. Went. I have a favor to ask of you all, and I am sure you will grant it. Say nothing to anybody about this matter. Leave it entirely to me. I do not wish to have this entertainment end in a scandal. Mr. Mook may have misunderstood, or the conversation may have been in jest. Go to the parlor, and, above all, if you see the signal—the fire that Mr. Mook thinks he heard spoken of—do not go near the gate. Will you please me in this?

Pog. We will.

[*The rest bow, and all rise. They move toward the door.*]

Dr. Farlow Let me add my request to that of Mrs. Wentwich. [*They bow. Exit MOOK, MRS. MOOK and POGGENBURG.*] What are we to do?

Mrs. Went. Leave it to me, if you please.

Dr. Farlow But the name of my ward has been mentioned.

Mrs. Went. It is all a misconception, no doubt. Let me manage it.

Dr. Farlow. As you please, but call on me for any help you need.

Mrs. Went. I will.

Dr. Farlow (*Aside*) But I will act on my own account.
(*Bows. Exit.*)

(*MRS. WENTWICH goes quickly to the table, and strikes a bell. Enter HENRY, a servant.*)

Mrs. Went. Go to Miss Aldridge's room and see if she is there. Tell her that some of her friends are inquiring for

her. Hurry. (*Exit HENRY*) If Hester Aldridge is the woman who is going to elope, who is the man? My husband? No, no! Did he not to-night choose between us, and choose me? Yet he was once her lover, and may be yet. He may have said what he did to deceive me, and then hurried preparations to elope with her. If I thought so—but how wildly foolish I am! It cannot be that my husband is untrue. The idea is preposterous, and I will soon be laughing at my idle fright. Yet, where is Arthur? I have not seen him for half an hour.

[*Enter HENRY.*

Henry Miss Aldridge is in her room. She says she doesn't feel well, but that you needn't come up. She will come down soon.

Mrs. Went. Did you see her?

Henry Just a glimpse, as she came to the door.

Mrs. Went. How was she dressed?

Henry In something dark, I believe.

Mrs. Went. Not in the dress you saw her wearing before this evening?

Henry Oh no; it was a different one.

Mrs. Went. Have you seen Mr. Wentwich recently?

Henry No, ma'am; but he may have been in the stables. I saw the coachman harnessing the horses, and I suppose it was by Mr. Wentwich's order.

Mrs. Went. (*With forced calmness*) Henry, you were given a pistol to carry, after the burglars tried to break into the house. Have you got it now?

Henry I carry it in my pocket all the time, ma'am.

Mrs. Went. Give it to me. (*He shows surprise*) Give it to me, Henry. (*He takes a pistol from his pocket and hands it to her*) You may go.

Henry What are you going to do with it, ma'am?

Mrs. Went. Oh, I don't know. (*Seeing his reluctance*) No harm will come to you. It was given you as a weapon against robbers. I may use it to kill one who would rob me of everything (*Peremptorily*) Go. (*Exit HENRY*) Let me think—when shall I do it? Am I losing power of

thought? They are to meet down there at the gate—that was their plan—and the fire is to be the signal and cover for their flight. (*Goes to the window*) I will wait here for the light, and see if she quits the house. If she does I will follow, and—(*A light outside the window*) Ah! There is the signal for their crime—and mine!

[*The light falls upon MRS. WENTWICH as she stands looking eagerly out of the window, shading her eyes with one hand, and holding the revolver in the other.*

CURTAIN.

ACT SECOND.

SCENE.—*A garden adjoining the WENTWICH residence. A side of the house, with the windows lighted, shows at the right. A corner window in the second story is open, and may be reached by means of a ladder and entered. A high hedge runs obliquely from back of the house to the left front of the stage. A light, as from a bonfire, shines back of the hedge, dying out gradually.*

At the point indicated in the act, the scene changes without lowering the curtain. The house swings out of sight, and the hedge slides to the right, revealing a landscape and an ornamental, closed gate, with water in the distance.

The rising of the curtain discloses POGGENBURG, looking up intently at the open window.

Pog. There is the light, but let it blaze. I have always diplomatically refrained from mixing in affairs that do not concern me, and that rule should be most rigidly applied to other folks' elopements. Let this elopement proceed, as long as it does not involve the carrying off of Mrs. Van-

mander. It struck me that it would be wise, as a precautionary measure, to keep an eye on her window until the elopement is accomplished. (*Looking up at the house*) The northeast corner room on the second floor—so said the maid. That is the window, and it is open, on account of the heat. There is a faint light burning in the room. Now, if I could only make her hear a serenade, while all the guests are on the other side of the house looking at the bonfire. A plaintive melody might soften her ossified heart; but I suppose it would have to be played with a steam-whistle. How can I make her hear? Wonder if I couldn't climb into her room, gently insert the trumpet in her ear, and retire without waking her? Then she might hear me sing. I saw a ladder as I came around the house. (*Exit behind the house. Returns with a ladder*) I've got it. Now for a bold but cool move. (*Puts the ladder up to the window, cautiously climbs up, and looks in*) She is fast asleep, and the bugle lies on the bureau. (*Climbs in.*)

[*Enter Mrs. Mook from back of the house. She looks at the ladder, and then at the window.*

Mrs. Mook O my! I have stumbled right on the elopement. I promised Mrs. Wentwich I wouldn't go down to the gate, and I won't. But I'll wait and see who comes down that ladder. (*Mrs. Mook goes close to the hedge, in the shadow, and watches. POGGENBURG reappears at the window, and gets out on the ladder*) O goodness!—it's Mr. Poggensburg. Wonder if the woman is coming down?

Pog. The trumpet is adjusted, and the petrification still slumbers. Now to awaken her gently with a song. (*He may sing a verse or two.*)

(*Mrs. Mook has incautiously moved out of the shadow, and POGGENBURG sees her.*)

Pog. Perdition!

Mrs. Mook (*Standing on her tip-toes, and speaking cautiously*) Never mind me—bring her down. I won't interfere—it's so romantic. (*POGGENBURG comes hastily down the ladder, and confronts Mrs. Mook*) I say, go on with the

elopement, Mr. Poggenburg—don't mind me. (*Looking up at the window*) Why doesn't she come out? Who is she?

Pog. Mrs. Mook, are you crazy? I am not going to elope.

Mrs. Mook No? O pshaw! Then what were you doing up there on the ladder?

Pog. I was simply taking a little exercise. I was warm and cramped in the house, and came out here to stretch myself.

Mrs. Mook Was that what made you leave me so ungallantly? Our flirtation wasn't half over.

Pog (*Aside*) Our flirtation!

[*Mrs. Mook takes his arm, and he reluctantly walks with her to and fro across the stage. She is very languishing and he nervous.*

Mrs. Mook The fire has almost gone out, over there. So there must have been something in what Mr. Mook overheard. How I would like to go down to the gate and watch.

Pog. Go—that is a good idea—and I will stay.

Mrs. Mook No; Mrs. Wentwich made us promise not to, and I suppose it wouldn't do. How romantic it is here, Mr. Poggenburg.

Pog. Let me seriously ask you if, in your opinion, it would be romantic if your husband should bound out here—bound out like an infuriated tiger—and tear me into bits?

Mrs. Mook Very.

Pog. Well, madam, if you really desire such a consummation, just detain me here until he comes, and witness the deadly spectacle.

Mrs. Mook Haven't you any soul for sentiment? Why won't you flirt? I declare, I never saw such a man. My husband wouldn't kill you—I don't think that he would do more than maul you; and then I would nurse you through a long and painful illness. Wouldn't that be nice?

Pog. I feel certain that continued robustness of health would be nicer. If you will excuse me now, I will return to the house.

Mrs. Mook And leave me?

Pog. Yes.

Mrs. Mook Don't go. Stay with me and flirt.

Pog. No, madam—I am wholly devoted to Mrs. Vanmader, who is sleeping at the top end of that ladder—perhaps hearing the gentle song of the mosquito, through the trumpet that I have put in her ears, and dreaming of me.

Mrs. Mook What! That deaf old woman?

Pog. The same.

Mrs. Mook Bah! Now there was Major Folsom, he's been wanting to flirt with me all the evening; but my husband wouldn't get jealous of the Major, and so of course it wasn't any fun. He is jealous enough of you to murder you, and you won't flirt. It's too bad—and I counted on having such a splendid time. I'm going to cry.

(She pouts, and takes out a handkerchief.)

Pog. Don't do that! Stop it—and I'll flirt—I'll flirt, recklessly, in the very jaws of death!

Mrs. Mook Will you?

(She puts her hands on his shoulders, and looks up languishingly in his face. Enter MOOK from behind the house.)

Mook (furiously) Ah! Oho! At last! Caught! Aha! *(Shakes his fist at Poggenburg.)* You sneaking old disturber of my peace! Are you ready to die?

Pog. I'd rather have the execution put off, if it won't be any inconvenience.

Mrs. Mook (Aside) This is superb.

Mook You were the elopers, after all, eh? Oh, the deceit of you! I will call the people, and expose you.

(MR. MOOK goes to the corner of the house, MRS. MOOK runs after him, seizes his coat-tails and pulls him back.)

Mrs. Mook Don't, don't! My gracious! its getting too interesting. We don't want to clope—honest and true, we don't.

Pog. We do not, Mr. Mook; at least I do not—I can't speak for your erratic wife. Maybe she would have eloped

with me, in spite of desperate resistance, if you hadn't come as you did.

Mook That's like a poltroon, to turn against his dupe when the danger comes. Come, Mrs. Mook—I forgive you and will protect you. As for you, sir, I will deal with you to-morrow. Mrs. Wentwich said distinctly that she wanted no scandal connected with this entertainment, and I will respect her wishes. But you will hear from me to-morrow, sir. (*To Mrs. Mook*) Come!

(*Exeunt MR. and MRS. MOOK back of the house, MOOK menacing.*)

Pog. It seems to me that I am in a position in which all my diplomatic powers may be tried.

(*Exit behind the house.*)

[*The scene changes, as previously described, and moonlight is shown. ABEL and HESTER enter R. She stops c.*]

Abel Why do you draw back? Do you hesitate? Believe me, no act of mine shall ever cause you to regret this adventure.

Hester I hesitate because I am bewildered; but do not think that I dread consequences. I am a strange woman even to myself—incomprehensible to others. [*Laughs.*] A German physician whom I met abroad said that I would likely become insane sometime. Well, impulses do control me, utterly. My impulse now is to smite a woman who is happy in the place that should be mine. I cannot do that—no way is presented. If there was—[*Makes a gesture of desperate menace.*] Until to-night I hoped to take her husband's love away from her. You offer to make me your wife. That gives me the chance to at least rob her of the knowledge of my misery, and I accept it. I do not deceive you. To-morrow I may hate you for the part you are taking; but my present desire is to return here in an hour to say, "I am married."

Abel You shall. I will go and see if the carriage is ready, and return at once. [*Exit by gate.*]

Hester What am I doing? I scarcely know or care. Oh,

how miserable I am!—so miserable that I have a mind to throw myself into the river yonder. Was the German physician right?

[*Enter* MRS. WENTWICH, R. *She excitedly confronts* HESTER, *and they look at each other silently for an instant.* *Exit* DR. FARLOW, L.

Mrs. Went. Tell me the truth, Hester Aldridge; do not dare to lie. You are here to elope with your lover. I know it.

Hester If you know it already, there is scarcely a need of my saying yes.

Mrs. Went. The man is my husband. [*HESTER does not reply.*] Is that so?

Hester That is not so.

Mrs. Went. (*Eagerly.*) Tell me the truth.

Hester (*After a pause, as though enjoying* MRS. WENTWICH'S *suspense.*) That is the truth. You fancied that I was crushed by your husband's avowal of sole love for you. I was merely satisfying my curiosity. I had already engaged to marry Mr. Milburn. You do not believe it? [*Goes to the gate, followed by* MRS. WENTWICH, *and opens it partially.*] Do you see him?

Mrs. Went. Yes.

Hester (*Shutting the gate.*) That is the carriage that is to take us to a clergyman. We have planned an entertaining surprise for your guests.

Mrs. Went. Thank God. (*Taking* HESTER'S *hand.*) And you forgive me. I love my husband so well that a momentary conviction of his perfidy maddens me. I knew that you and he had been sweethearts; I thought that you were envious and desperate; they told me that you had planned an elopement; and it was natural for me to conclude that my husband was going to desert me. Jealousy, you know, does not stop to reason, and I was wildly jealous. Forgive me, Hester, for it was in my wicked heart to take your life. I hardly know whether I would have done it, and I hope I would not; but I took a pistol from Henry for that dreadful purpose.

Hester You took a pistol from Henry, the servant?

Mrs. Went. Yes.

Hester And did you tell him what for?

Mrs. Went. I fear I did say something of my intention; but pray forgive—

Hester (Interrupting) If you had killed me here, although nobody saw it, the crime would have been readily fastened upon you. Your belief that your husband and I were going to elope, your words when you borrowed the pistol—all would have been evidence against you. Does it not appear so to you?

Mrs. Went. Yes, yes; I have been saved from a dreadful crime and the certain penalty.

Hester Not from the penalty. Where is the pistol? (*Mrs. Wentwich takes the pistol from her pocket.*) Give it to me. (*Snatches it.*)

Mrs. Went. What are you going to do? You would not kill me? I believe you are insane.

Hester You were at least right when you supposed that I was desperate. I do not care to live, and I will not when by dying I can bring a terrible vengeance upon you.

Mrs. Went. You are a madwoman.

(*Turns as though to escape. HESTER grasps her by the wrist.*)

Hester Mad? Well, see how adroitly a maniac can plan revenge. You came here, as you say, with murder in your heart. The circumstances would have convicted you, if you had killed me. Those circumstances shall convict you all the same, for I will fire the shot myself.

(*Fires at herself, drops the pistol, and falls. Mrs. Wentwich stands stupefied with amazement. Enter ABEL by the gate, and all the other characters, L. Wentwich goes C.*)

Wentwich What is this?

Dr. Farlow (Raising HESTER a little) She has been shot.

Abel She is dying.

Wentwich Where is the murderer?

Hester (With a desperate effort, and pointing at Mrs. Wentwich) There! She did it.

Mrs. Went. I? (*All look at her with surprise.*)

Dr. Far. (Aside) What might come of this? (*HESTER falls from his arms. He hesitates an instant.*) She is dead. (*Tableau.*)

CURTAIN.

ACT THIRD.

SCENE.—*A room in the Tombs. The walls are plain and bare. At R. a grated window. Doors back and L. A table, C., chairs, a rug, and some other furniture look as though temporarily put in.*

The rise of the curtain discloses WENTWICH seated by the table, dejected, and ABEL standing at the opposite side of the table.

Wentwich You say that there is no hope of further postponement, and that the trial must begin to-morrow.

Abel Yes; Mr. Findley thinks so, and he is a lawyer whose judgment is usually good. Will she not hear us? (*Looks towards the door, R.*)

Went. I closed the door so that she might sleep, if she could. She is well-nigh exhausted.

Abel Six months of prison life and the constant torture of her position are enough to have killed her.

Went. And we can do so little to make her surroundings comfortable—nothing, alas! to cheer her. It may be as well that no further postponement of the trial is possible.

Abel Really, the defence has exhausted every argument in securing the delay already gained.

Went. The prosecution is ready?

Abel Ready and confident. Every witness is secured. Henry is in the House of Detention. He says it is cruel to make a servant swear against his mistress, but he must tell the truth. I have tried every means in vain to change his purpose.

Went. Dr. Farlow, too, is to be a witness for the prosecution?

Abel His testimony will relate only to the cause of Miss Aldridge's death. He made the post-mortem examination, you remember. How he could do it, seeing that she was his ward, is more than I can understand. Perhaps he was anxious to be thoroughly convinced that she was dead, and that her fortune was really left in his hands.

Went. Are you envious?

Abel As there is a heaven above me, no; but your poor wife's sorrow is such a reproach to me, considering the part I had in bringing it upon her, that I feel savage against all who are to go on the stand against her.

Went. (*Rising*) Abel, you have labored assiduously for my poor wife. I wish to feel that every possible thing has been done to save her from conviction.

Abel I have done all I could, and that is little enough; but she will have the best defence that money and ingenuity can get for her, whatever may be the result.

Went. You know of nothing more that, at any cost, might help her case?

Abel Nothing.

Went. And you deem her case hopeless?

Abel I have not said so.

Went. But you think so. I have seen it in your face a hundred times. My poor wife is doomed. Oh, Abel, it is terrible.

Abel (*Taking WENTWICH's hand*) My friend, do not entirely despair. Juries are human. Who knows but some of the twelve men will discern the truth in spite of all?

Went. The truth?

Abel (*Drawing back*) The question has been on my tongue before, but I have hesitated to ask it. Do you believe that your wife is guilty?

Went. She is guilty of no intentional wrong.

Abel Do you believe she fired the shot that killed Hester Aldridge?

Went. Abel, I must believe it; but it was through her love of me, and I would be inhuman to blame her. Unfortunate circumstances convinced her that Hester and I were going

to elope. She was maddened—justly unaccountable to human and divine law for what she did, and ought to be so to man.

Abel I believe that I am the only person who feels assured of her innocence. It is not for me to say that you should believe so, too—against circumstances, against reason. No doubt you are conscientious; and your belief makes it easier for me to do my errand. Mr. Findley deems it wisest to make a plea of manslaughter, hoping that the District Attorney will accept it. He advises that course.

Went. Then he fears a verdict of murder if the case goes to the jury?

Abel Yes; and the accuracy of his judgment is what appalls me. Arthur, it was partly through me that all this has come upon your wife. God knows how deeply I feel it. (*Dashing tears from his eyes*) Mr. Findley thought it better that I should broach the subject of a plea of manslaughter to her. That is my unpleasant errand.

(*A key is turned noisily in the door, L. Enter MRS. MOOK, attended by a jailor, who retires, locking the door behind him.*)

Mrs. Mook (*Shuddering as she hears the key turn*) Oh, what a cold clang. (*Shakes hands with WENTWICH and bows to ABEL*) Perhaps I am late. I promised to come and see her early this morning. How is she?

Went. As well as a broken, despairing woman can be.

Mrs. Mook My husband came with me, but I made him stay down-stairs. He is such a bother when I am serious. (*Enter POGGENBURG, L. The jailor unlocks the door, and as he is about to relock it, Mook pushes past him*) How do you do, Mr. Poggenburg? (*Shakes hands with him. To Mook*) I thought you were going to stay below.

Mook You may have thought so—wished so; but (*Glancing significantly at POGGENBURG*) I changed my mind. (*Bows to ABEL and WENTWICH. MRS. MOOK goes to the door, R.*)

Pog. Nephew—Mr. Wentwich, don't be downcast. The darkest hour has a silver lining. That is to say, the blackest cloud is just before the day. Cheer up, anyhow.

Mrs. Mook I hear her stirring. I will go in. (*Exit up L. Mook, who has followed her, takes a seat, R.*)

Went. I would give any price for the smallest reason for cheerfulness. Here is my wife dying, I believe, of this prison dreariness, and I cannot tell her that she will not go from here to worse confinement, or to the scaffold.

Pog. Don't be so hopeless.

Went. Abel comes from our senior counsel with the advice that she plead guilty to manslaughter. He thinks an acquittal impossible.

Abel It is as he says, Uncle Jonas.

Pog. Then look here. (*Looks at Mook*) Mr. Mook, would you mind going back to the office. (*Mook rises, but hesitates*) Oh, I'll not touch your wife. (*Pounds on the door, L.*) We wish to consult privately. (*Enter jailor.*)

Mook (*Crossing to L.*) If I afterwards learn—

Pog. All right, Mr. Mook. (*Exit Mook and the jailor*) I was going to say, that if Mrs. Wentwich cannot escape lawfully, she must escape unlawfully.

Went. What do you mean?

Abel That she can be got out of this prison?

Pog. Nothing else.

Went. Impossible.

Pog. Quite possible, sir. Money—and I can do it.

Abel Whatever is done must be at once.

Pog. Mr. Wentwich, authorize me to use your money without stint, and I will buy your wife's way right through the walls of the Tombs.

Went. Well, see what can be done. There shall be no lack of money, if we decide to adopt such a course.

Pog. I'm off and at it. [*Pounds on the door, L.*] I have already planned it out in my head. You shall hear from me. [*Enter jailor.*] Good-day.

[*Exeunt POGGENBURG and jailor.*]

[*Enter MRS. WENTWICH and MRS. MOOK, U. E.*]

Mrs. Mook Oh, my dear, this room really isn't so uncomfortable.

[*Stands R. c.*]

Mrs. Went. (*Bowing to ABEL, and forcing herself to speak guily*) Oh, it is cosy, at least, [*Glancing at the barred*

window] and very safe. [*Giving way to emotion*] It is a tomb, indeed—a horrible, horrible place.

Went. (*Leading her to a chair by the table*) You are ill, my darling. This prison life is killing you.

[*He covers his face and weeps. She rises and puts her arms around him.*]

Mrs. Went. It is killing you, I fear. Do not give way.

Went. We must not, for Abel brings word that the trial is to go on to-morrow.

Mrs. Went. As well then as ever. Oh, I know the worst. You all try to comfort me, and to make me courageous; but not one of you says there is any chance of acquittal. You know there is none. I know it, too; for I have studied every point of my desperate case over, and over, and over—day and night, day and night. I said that I could kill any woman who took my husband from me; I became convinced that my husband and Hester Aldridge were about to elope; I borrowed a pistol from Henry, telling him that I might use it to “kill one who would rob me of everything;” Hester Aldridge was killed with that same pistol; I was found alone with her, with the pistol smoking at my feet; and the dying woman accused me of murder. [*Rises.*] All that is truth, but it is false truth, for it supports a lie. She died with a lie on her lips to wreak an awful vengeance on me.

[*WENTWICH puts an arm around her, and seats her in the chair.*]

Went. Be calm.

[*Stands behind her.*]

Mrs. Went. Nobody sees the deadly force of all this evidence more clearly than I do. It will convince a jury as surely as it is presented to them. [*To ABEL.*] You know it will.

Abel (*Standing at the opposite side of the table*) Mr. Findley thinks so.

Mrs. Went. There, did I not say so?

Abel He sends by me his deliberate advice. He has studied the case carefully, and he does not feel justified in letting it go to a jury if that can be avoided. His opinion is that—

Mrs. Went. Well, well?

Abel He advises a plea of manslaughter, and is hopeful that such a course will save you from—something worse.

Mrs. Went. He advises me to confess that I killed Hester Aldridge? How can I do that when I am innocent? Then he, too, thinks me guilty.

Abel Alas, dear Mrs. Wentwich, I fear he does. He urged at first, you know, a defence on the ground of your irresponsibility for an act committed in an insane passion.

Mrs. Went. Which would make me confess a lie. Do you think that I fired that shot?

Abel I do not. Although I realize the convincing nature of the evidence against you, I do assure you that I have not for an instant doubted your word. It may be that the brief insight that was given me, on that fatal night, of Miss Aldridge's character, helped me to afterward understand the truth. Certain I am that you are not a murderess. [*She clasps his hand across the table.*] Forgive me, if you can, for the part I have had in your sorrow.

Mrs. Went. (*Looking up to her husband, who is still standing behind her chair*) And you—if I had a doubt of your faith in me, I could not bear my cruel position at all, but would let it kill me. [*He averts his face, but gives her his hand; then kisses her. She rises. To ABEL*] Tell Mr. Findley that I will not falsely accuse myself of murder, even to change my undeserved punishment from death to imprisonment. I stand before God an innocent woman, no matter what men may believe, or do to me. [*To WENTWICH*] Arthur, do you not think I am right?

Went. I do not advise you to take Mr. Findley's counsel in this matter. We have a better plan.

Mrs. Went. Do not raise my hopes purposelessly. Has any evidence of the truth been discovered?

Went. We have discovered a way to get you out of this prison—to put you out of reach of the law.

Mrs. Went. Explain.

Went. Your escape is being arranged, and must be effected to-day. To-morrow your trial would begin, and its end would be your conviction. After that a more vigorous

confinement might make escape impossible; so it must be done to-day.

Mrs. Went. Can it really be done?

Abel It must.

Mrs. Went. (*Meditatively*) I would feel guilty if I ran away; it would be taken for a confession.

Went. What does that matter? I shall go with you, and we will make for ourselves a safe home among strangers.

Mrs. Went. To stay is sure conviction.

Went. You must not stay.

Mrs. Went. But if I go I will be thought a murderess.

Went. The public thinks so now. Forgive me if my words are cruel, but we must look our trouble squarely in the face. The evidence, circumstantial though it be, is conclusive against you. Mr. Findley says that it would surely convince a jury. Your explanation, that Hester killed herself to involve you, would be of no weight in your defence, because it is unreasonable.

Mrs. Went. Arthur, do you not believe that I am innocent? [*He hesitates.*] Tell me. [*Clutches his arm.*] My God! Do you, too, think that I am a murderess? [*Recoils.*

Went. (*Taking her hands*) Whatever you did was because of love of me. You were maddened—irresponsible. [*She pulls away.*] I love you all the more for that unfortunate proof of your devotion.

Mrs. Went. (*Dropping on her knees*) On my knees I swear, by my hope of heaven—

Went. (*Quickly lifting her to her feet*) Do not perjure yourself. To me your act has no guilt, for I know the terrible temptation.

Mrs. Went. Oh, I could bear everything but this—everything but this. [*He attempts to take her hand, but she draws it away.*] I should loathe you if I thought you were a murderer.

Went. I tell you that your deed is not in my estimation a murder. You are to me the same pure woman that I wooed and married. All that I said then of my love I say now. As your husband, I have never ceased to be your ardent lover. This great trouble will only bring us closer together, and we will be happy again in a safe refuge.

[*Enter* POGGENBURG, *let in by the jailor.*

Pog. (*To jailor*) Wait a second. [*Coming forward*] Abel, you must not be involved in this.

Went. That is right. You are a lawyer and must not be professionally compromised. You have done your whole duty already, and shall not be dragged into this matter. Besides, you could not help us.

Abel I will not shrink from any service.

Pog. Go, Abel. A lawyer's fame is very susceptible; a diplomat's is tough.

Abel Shall I tell Mr. Findley that Mrs. Wentwich refuses to plead guilty of manslaughter?

Mrs. Went. Yes.

Went. She shall not need to do so.

[*Exeunt* ABEL and the jailor.]

Went. Well?

Pog. I have worked expeditiously and adroitly; but I hold the golden key to the prison. Mrs. Wentwich may walk out unhindered. I have bribed the officers now on duty. The pay is so high that they can afford to take the consequences; but they insist on a show of honesty. I am to bring in a woman who works about the prison, and you are to change clothes with her—she remaining, and you going. Ah, this is a job that I shall be proud of.

Went. And this woman?

Pog. Is yet to be bought. They tell me, too, that she is very honest; but of course she has a price. The delay is the danger.

Mrs. Mook There need be no delay. I will take her place.

Went. You?

Mrs. Mook Why not? They can't kill me. Why shouldn't I do something for my dearest friend?

Pog. Really, if you will—time is most precious.

Mrs. Mook I am in earnest.

Pog. Then go into the other room, and exchange dresses as quickly as you can.

Mrs. Mook Come.

Went. It is best.

Mrs. Went. (To WENTWICH) You do believe that I killed Hester Aldridge. [*He puts his arms around her. She struggles to get away.*] Don't let me touch you, if there is blood on my hands.

Pog. Hush, Mrs. Wentwich. You may be overheard, and your escape made impossible.

Mrs. Went. I escape? From what? Alas! I cannot escape from my husband's belief that I am guilty.

Went. You are mad. Come, permit us to save you.

Mrs. Went. No; I will stay. Neither entreaty nor force shall make me go. A jury of strangers may not be so hard against me as my own husband. [*Tableau.*]

CURTAIN.

ACT FOURTH.

SCENE—*Same as in Act Third. This scene must be so constructed that a quick transformation can be made to that of the yard of the Tombs, and back again, at the points indicated in the act. By some ingenuity and the proper mechanism, these changes could be made an effective feature. A group of persons could be instantaneously introduced in the yard by means of the Pepper ghost apparatus, and the illusion not only serve to quickly fill the stage, but would mystify the audience. Various other devices suggest themselves.*

(*Mrs. WENTWICH reclines on the bed, and WENTWICH sits by the side of it.*)

Wentwich Now you are yourself again.

Mrs. Went. Have I been asleep long?

Went. Three weeks, my dear.

Mrs. Went. Three weeks?

Went. But it was an uneasy sleep. You have had a dangerous fever.

Mrs. Went. Have three weeks gone since that awful day in court?

Went. Yes.

Mrs. Went. That is the last that I remember—the trial, in which truth was made false in its effect; the judge's charge, in which the false truth was presented so strongly against me; the suspense, while waiting for a verdict that I hoped against hope would not be the dreaded one; the final condemnation, by which I was branded as a murderess. I do not wonder that I fainted, or that fever seized upon me. Oh, if I only could have died, without ever again coming to a consciousness of my terrible doom!

Went. Do not say that. (*Weeps.*)

Mrs. Went. (*Caressing him*) I will not, if it grieves you. I will keep a brave heart if I can. (*Breaking down*) But I can't. Not a ray of comfort comes to me out of all the blackness. (*Embraces Wentwich and weeps.*) Arthur, has your love for me been displaced by your belief in my guilt?

Went. No, my darling, (*rises*) because my love was not lessened, even when I thought yours had led you to the commission of a deadly deed. Now I believe that you did not kill Hester Aldridge, and love is tender with grief at having wronged you.

Mrs. Went. (*Rising in bed, and throwing her arms around him*) Thank God for this. (*Laughs hysterically.*)

Went. There, you must not excite yourself. (*Puts her back on the bed.*) And you must not forgive me so readily. It was only when I observed that your ravings in fever were all in accord with your previous accounts of Hester's death that I accepted the truth. You went through the tragedy repeatedly, always exactly the same, and never saying a word that was not compatible with what you had said when conscious. Then, my wife, I wept for my injustice, and prayed that you might not die without knowing how sorry I was.

Mrs. Went. Oh, you have made me so happy that I want to live. (*He kisses her tenderly.*) Why do you look at me so sadly? (*Cries out*) Ah—h! I know now. I had for-

gotten. I am condemned as a murderess. Am I to go to the scaffold? Tell me the worst.

Went. You have not been sentenced yet. Your illness has prevented.

Mrs. Went. And the sentence will be death, will it not?

Went. It cannot be otherwise. (*She shudders and covers her face.*) But I will not believe that they will hang a woman. They must—shall—at least commute your punishment to imprisonment for life.

Mrs. Went. Worse than death.

Went. Heaven may yet provide proof of your innocence.

Mrs. Went. There is hope in your words, but none in your face.

(*She looks wistfully around, and at the partly open door.*)

Went. You are thinking of escape.

Mrs. Went. Yes; I could be happy with you anywhere now, since you are convinced.

Went. Alas! escape would be difficult now. You could not walk, and would have to be carried. They are so confident of your helplessness that they leave the corridor open for our convenience. (*Mrs. Wentwich falls back with a sigh.*) We are exhausting you, and you are weak yet. We must be careful of your health, at least.

Mrs. Went. What does it matter?

[*A rap at the door. Enter Dr. FARLOW.*]

Dr. Far. May I come in?

Went. Yes.

Dr. Far. (*Goes to the bedside*) How is our patient this evening?

Mrs. Went. Dr. Farlow, are you attending me?

Dr. Far. (*Looks at her searchingly*) Yes; I have been doing my best during your illness; but now that you have come out of the delirium, if you desire a change of physicians, do not hesitate to say so.

Mrs. Went. I do not wish to be capricious.

Dr. Far. It is natural that, in your sad situation, you should have some feeling against me as a witness for the prosecution, although my testimony was of the most formal character, and really contributed nothing against you.

Went. We cannot blame you, Doctor. You simply testified that Hester Aldridge died of a pistol shot wound.

Dr. Far. That was all; and, if I took the matter of investigating the immediate cause of death out of the coroner's hands, by making the post-mortem examination by myself, believe me, it was because I sought to cover the hideous details as far as possible from public exhibition. But this kind of talk will not help our patient.

(Takes her hand to feel her pulse. She starts, and he drops her hand.)

Went. You are nervous, Doctor, as well as she.

Dr. Far. Yes; a rather startling occurrence this morning—that is, a trifling thing, but rather disturbing—*(feels her pulse again)* nothing of consequence, however.

(A woman's voice is heard faintly outside, crying, "Help, help!") *Mrs. Wentwich sits up and listens.*

Mrs. Went. What is that?

Went. *(Going to the window)* A crazy or drunken prisoner, I suppose. *(The voice is heard again outside.)* A woman.

(Dr. Farlow listens, draws back from the bed, and is uneasy.)

Mrs. Went. *(Getting off the bed)* That voice—I think I know it.

Dr. Far. *(Goes to Mrs. Wentwich, and gently makes her sit on the bed.)* This will not do; you must be quiet.

Went. *(Going to the back of the bed)* What excites you, my dear? *(Screams are heard outside.)*

Mrs. Went. Ah! I am not mistaken. That is the voice of Hester Aldridge, or her ghost.

Dr. Far. This is delirium. *(Takes hold of Mrs. Wentwich, who tries to go toward the window, and forcibly restrains her.)* She must be restrained.

(Wentwich tries to pacify her. The voice outside, "I won't be held; let me go!") *Mrs. Wentwich breaks away, runs to the window, and looks out. Wentwich follows her.*

Dr. Farlow goes L., and shows agitation.

Mrs. Went. Is that Hester Aldridge? You are in your senses. Look and tell me.

Went. It is she.

Dr. Far. Destruction! (*Goes quickly to the door.*)

[*Tableau. The scene changes, as described above, to the prison yard.*

(*HESTER ALDRIDGE stands, R., or enters. Her clothing and hair are disordered. The jailor and other persons are grouped around her. Moonlight.*

Hester (*With the manner of a maniac*) Let me go, I say. What right have you to keep me? What have you brought me here for? I've just escaped from one prison, and you want to put me in another. You shall not do it. Help, help! (*The jailor advances, as though to secure her*) Don't dare to touch me, you ruffian! I am Hester Aldridge—I am wealthy, and you shall suffer for this. (*The jailor falls back.*)

Dr. Farlow (*Entering hurriedly from the prison*) Secure her! She is a maniac. She escaped from my charge this morning. Put her in a cell, and I will have her removed to an asylum without delay. She must not be permitted to see or speak with anybody—be sure of that. (*Aside*) If I can get her away from here, all may yet be well.

Hester (*As DR. FARLOW and the jailor go toward her*) You shall not shut me up again. (*Screams. Enter ABEL and POGGENBURG, L. They look at HESTER in amazement.*)

Abel Hester Aldridge!

Pog. She or her apparition.

Abel Amazement. What does this mean?

Dr. Farlow She is mad, and must be secured. (*Seizes her. She escapes and runs into the prison. All start to follow her. DR. FARLOW turns, and goes L., as though to escape. ABEL and POGGENBURG follow and detain him*) How dare you detain me?

Abel Why do you want to escape?

Pog. Better stay and explain, Doctor.

(*The scene changes back to the prison interior, as in the beginning of the act. WENTWICH and MRS. WENTWICH are disclosed at the window.*



Hester (Dashing in) Hide me, hide me! (*Sees MRS. WENTWICH*) Mrs. Wentwich! Arthur! You shall not have him. You came out here to kill me. Ha, ha, ha! Give me the pistol. The circumstances would have convicted you if you had done it, and they shall convict you all the same, for I will fire the shot myself. Oh, you shall not rob me of my lover, but shall be hanged. Ha, ha, ha!

Went. Hester alive? What mystery is this?

Mrs. Went. It dazes me.

(*Enter ABEL and POGGENBURG, with DR. FARLOW between them.*)

Abel This man can explain, I think.

Hester (Shrinking) Don't let him get me. He will lock me up again.

Abel Aha! it is clear enough. She has been imprisoned by Dr. Farlow.

Dr. Farlow There is some mistake.

Went. There has been a mistake—a dreadful one; but it is rectified. You spirited this woman away, and swore that she was dead, in order to steal her estate. It is a wonder you did not kill her.

Dr. Farlow (Aside) Curse my faint heart that I did not!

Went. (Puts his arm around MRS. WENTWICH) And you left this innocent woman to be condemned. Scoundrel!

Mrs. Wentwich But she is saved to you at last.

Pog. (As DR. FARLOW moves toward the door) Stop him!

[*Enter Jailor, who lays his hand on DR. FARLOW's shoulder.* TABLEAU.

CURTAIN.

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